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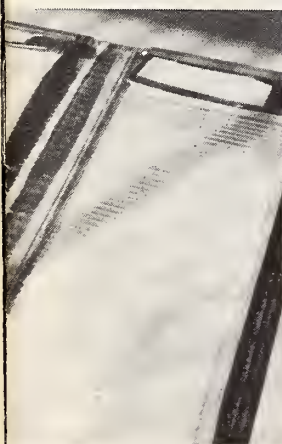
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Building a WIC Program

Health officials in Fairfax County, Virginia, are enthusiastic about their new WIC program. And they say its success is due largely to the way WIC is integrated into other county health programs.

WIC—the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children—is administered nationally by FNS, in cooperation with State and local agencies. The program provides a specially designed food package, along with nutrition education, to pregnant and nursing women, infants, and children up to their fifth birthday. Participants must be “at nutritional risk” because of poor diet and low income.

Fairfax County applied for the WIC Program in July 1976, and began almost immediately to work on a plan to implement it.

By December 1976, when the State Department of Health notified the county that its application had

been approved, Fairfax health officials were ready. They had done caseload surveys to determine the best locations for WIC sites. They had visited WIC programs in nearby counties to learn about possible pitfalls and food delivery systems. They had discussed their ideas for a voucher system with managers of local food stores and banks, and had found out where most potential recipients shop. They had planned ways to integrate WIC into the total health services system.

Dr. Richard K. Miller, health department director says, “When we actually moved into the WIC program, we were comfortable. We had done our homework.”

Sites carefully chosen

Fairfax County's WIC program



officially opened in April 1977 at two carefully selected sites, Herndon and Mt. Vernon. The clinics are some 40 road miles apart—at opposite ends of the county—but serve the two neediest areas of this Northern Virginia suburb.

Herndon is in the predominantly rural western end of the county. Mt. Vernon is in the southeastern end, an area of heavy commercial and residential development along U.S. Route 1. Both areas have large transient populations and concentrations of low-income housing.

By the end of the first week of operation, the two sites were serving about 112 women, infants, and children. By August, the number of WIC recipients had reached 284. The staff expects to reach its target caseload of 2,230 by next May.

Eventually, Fairfax hopes to expand the program to all six county health department offices.

Designing an integrated approach

The Fairfax County health department offers a wide range of clinical services: maternity care, postpartum services, pediatric services, and pregnancy counseling, to name just a few. In setting up the WIC program, the county staff made special efforts to coordinate it with these other services.

"From the time we found out we were going to get the WIC program, we decided to make it a functioning part of our comprehensive service, rather than a separate entity," says JoAnne Jorgenson, assistant director of nursing in charge of the WIC program.

Working closely with Shirley McCallum and Mary Walker, the nutritionists who would be assigned to the WIC clinics, Ms. Jorgenson made sure the entire health department staff was familiar with the WIC program.

Prior to starting the program, the three women met with nursing staffs and doctors at each of the six county clinics. They explained how the WIC program works, the philosophy behind it, and eligibility criteria.

They also met with directors of the obstetrics/gynecology and pediatrics clinics at Fairfax County Hospital to give them the information hospital doctors would need to refer patients to the program.

In addition, Ms. Jorgenson and the nutritionists visited with public health liaison nurses at the local hospital, so they would be able to support referral work of hospital physicians. Public health nurses work with hospital maternity clinics and see a significant number of patients regular health department clinics never see.

Planning pays off

Meeting with hospital and clinic staffs took time and planning, but the results have been worth the effort. "The first week we were in operation," JoAnne Jorgenson recalls, "the pediatrics staff at the county hospital wanted all the referral forms they could get. Pediatricians wanted to refer newborns immediately to WIC."

This interest in WIC has continued, and the referral system has been a tremendous help in assisting needy women and children.

In many cases the referrals are immediate. For example, when a teenage girl comes to a health department clinic for pregnancy counseling, the staff refers her to the WIC program right away if the preg-

nancy test is positive, and if she is eligible. This means the WIC staff can work with her from the early months of her pregnancy to make sure she gets the food and the nutrition education she needs.

Health officials say they're pleased with the way the "integrated approach" is benefiting the WIC program—and with the way WIC is improving the effectiveness of other health programs.

"WIC is getting people back into the clinics for related health services," explains Peggy Honeycutt, county director of nursing services. "It's helping us provide more comprehensive maternal and child care."

"The program is bringing to our attention children we might not otherwise see until they are 3 or 4 years old, or in school," she adds.

Dr. Miller agrees: "We expect to find that the WIC program will result in an increased number of infants eligible for our infant stimulation program and other programs for learning disabilities."

Coordination is ongoing

To help keep open the lines of communication to the rest of the health department staff, the WIC nutritionists hold periodic in-service training sessions at the county hospital and clinics.

Often the meetings focus on a particular area that needs better coordination. Last spring, for example, a series of meetings helped establish a county-wide infant feeding schedule. As Shirley McCallum explains, "We needed to coordinate our efforts so we won't be telling our clients five different things."

The WIC nutritionists have also been working individually with clinic staffs to make them more

aware of nutritional deviations and patterns. As a result, Shirley McCallum says she has seen “tremendous growth” among the rest of the health department staff in learning to recognize signs that indicate nutritional risk.

Ultimately, it’s the WIC clients who benefit from the in-service training, says JoAnne Jorgenson. The training has added a “whole new dimension” to the WIC program by increasing the nutrition awareness of clinic staffs. “The WIC nutritionists and clerks can provide direct education, and that’s important,” Ms. Jorgenson says, “but the clinic staffs—the people who actually see the patients—are in a special position to reinforce the program.”

Education is a team effort

While in-service training is a big responsibility of the Fairfax WIC nutritionists, their most important job is assessing the nutritional status of recipients and teaching them to improve their dietary patterns.

Both the Herndon and Mt. Vernon WIC projects employ a clerk as well as a nutritionist, and the clerk plays a key role in educating clients. In fact, the WIC clerk is a client’s first contact with the WIC program. Even before the nutritionist meets a client, the clerk has provided some very important instruction.

At the Herndon clinic, WIC clerk Betty Labin relishes her role as “the first representative” of the WIC program. Ms. Labin explains that her first responsibility is to double-

check the client’s income eligibility and the reason for her referral to the WIC program.

Referrals may be from a nurse or doctor at one of the four other health department clinics around the county, from an obstetrician or pediatrician at the county hospital, or from a private physician.

After making sure the patient has been properly referred and understands why, Ms. Labin explains how the program works—how to use the vouchers to buy specified foods, and where to shop. She makes arrangements for the patient to return for monthly checkups, and fills out the required paperwork. “By the time the recipient is ready to meet with the nutritionist for a nutrition assessment interview,” Ms. Labin says, “I think she understands the program pretty well.”

Of course, it’s still the nutritionists who provide the kind of nutrition counseling that addresses individual problems and needs. But, says Peggy Honeycutt, the WIC clerks get the clients’ attention with the vouchers so the nutritionists can give them the professional help they need.

“The clerks and nutritionists are partners, working together to render a full service,” she says.

Providing individual help

Because the WIC clerks handle the clerical and administrative duties, the nutritionists are free to spend most of their time on client education. “We feel very strongly that our nutritionists should spend at least 90 percent of their time on direct client education,” says JoAnne Jorgenson.

The nutritionists work primarily on an individual basis through interviews.

Shirley McCallum sees the interview with a WIC recipient as a chance to develop “realistic objectives” for improving the individual’s dietary pattern. First, she reviews clinical information—anthropometric data such as height and weight, and biochemical indicators like hemoglobin or hematocrit levels. Then, she interviews the patient to develop a dietary history. She asks the recipient to describe her eating habits. Ms. McCallum also attempts to find out a little more about the client’s family—how many children she has, what kind of relationships exist at home.

Shirley McCallum feels strongly about one-to-one contact with WIC participants. “Simply leaving a nutrition education component to a canned, coming-into-the-room-and-talking-to-them type of approach is not adequate,” she says. “We have to provide direct intervention, and there has to be follow-up.”

“Direct intervention” means making home visits to work with WIC mothers and children with special problems. Ms. McCallum recently visited the home of a Herndon mother whose child had a severe feeding problem. The mother knew what foods her baby needed, but

the child wouldn't eat them. By visiting with the mother in the home, Ms. McCallum could work with the tools the mother used, showing her different feeding techniques to correct the problem. As Ms. Jorgenson puts it, "This is not something that can be done in an office setting."

Right now, Ms. McCallum says, she is able to meet with every new WIC recipient. But what happens next year, when the Fairfax County program reaches its target caseload of 2,230 participants? About half of those recipients will be using the Herndon clinic.

In this situation, Ms. McCallum says, she'll have to make some adjustments. "When we get to that level, I won't be able to do some of

the things I'm doing now. But I can set priorities so I can still give individual attention to the highest risk children and mothers."

As the program grows, there will have to be adjustments in other areas as well. But the health department staff is confident that the basic structure they have built will be able to accommodate changes.

Three basic suggestions

Thinking about starting a WIC program? Looking for advice? Fairfax County health officials will tell you to:

- First, take a look at other WIC projects. Shirley McCallum says Fairfax County tried to learn from the pitfalls and problems other

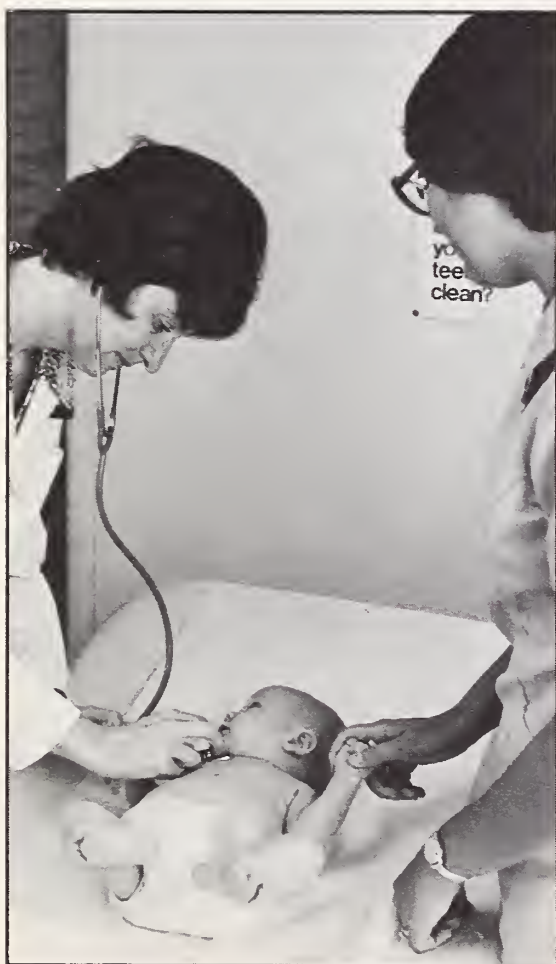
people experienced.

- Second, take the time to do some careful preplanning. From the beginning, Fairfax County tried to design the program to have fewer problems.

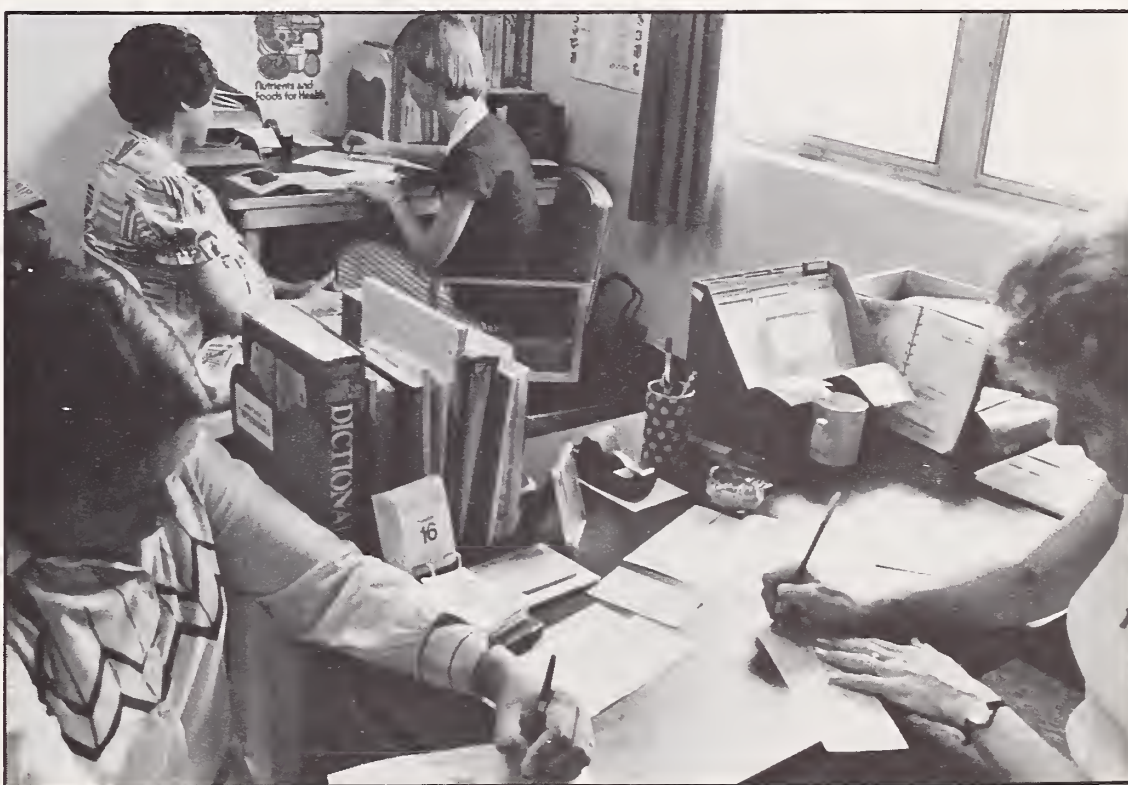
- Finally, integrate the program into the existing health-care system. In Fairfax County, the integrated approach has bolstered WIC participation, fostered support and enthusiasm for WIC among the health department staff, and enhanced effectiveness of the department's other clinical services.

"We learned the importance of the integrated approach," concludes JoAnne Jorgenson. "We think it can make or break a WIC program." □

By William J. Holleran



A county physician examines an infant. Physicians often make referrals to WIC.



WIC clerk, Betty Labin (front) and nutritionist Shirley McCallum work as a team in counseling WIC participants.

School Lunch and Health

What's school lunch got to do with health? Plenty. Schools participating in the National School Lunch Program serve nutritious, well-balanced meals—the kind of meals youngsters need to grow up strong and healthy.

But the program offers more than food. It offers an opportunity for students to learn why nutrition is important to good health. The following articles are about some school food service people who are working to make the school lunch program an exciting educational experience.

Georgia has a School Lunch Heart Week

Concerned by the heart disease statistics for their State, some Georgians have begun to consider the role of school nutrition in helping children form healthy dietary habits. For the past 3 years, the Georgia School Food Service Association (GSFSA) and the Georgia Heart Association have combined forces in a unique educational project—School Lunch Heart Week.

GSFSA President Modenia Andrews says the goal of School Lunch Heart Week is to give school children a “beginning understanding” of how food choices affect the heart. One day of the Week is designated School Lunch Heart Day, and to focus on this goal, participating schools serve a school lunch that tastes good and is low in fat and cholesterol.

Managers get training

Before undertaking the project, school food service managers attend heart/diet seminars sponsored jointly by the Georgia Heart Association and the Georgia School Food Service Association. Purpose

of the seminars is to provide managers with enough information to help them work with students and teachers in understanding the relationship of diet to the heart.

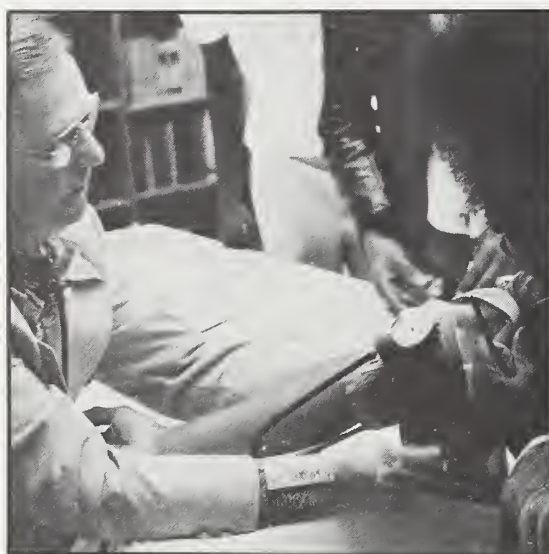
Seminar instructors point out that the Southeast has the highest incidence of heart disease and hypertension in the Nation. In the State of Georgia, they explain, some 800,000 people suffer from high blood pressure, and almost 9,000 die of cardiovascular disease each year. Savannah has the dubious distinction of being the “stroke capital of the world,” with the highest per capita rate of stroke.

The instructors also review some of the facts about diet and atherosclerosis, pointing out that Southern cooking has a lot to do with

the region's poor coronary health record. Southern cooking has traditionally involved deep-fat frying, stewing vegetables with fat, and adding lots of salt. The instructors stress that the same meals can be prepared with less fat and cholesterol.

Special menus developed

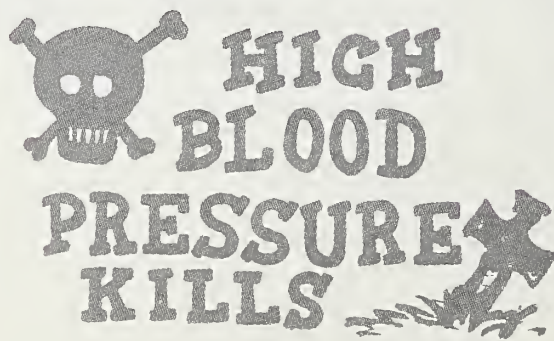
During the seminar, managers develop low-fat, low-cholesterol menus which they later prepare in their own schools. They receive packets containing games, bulletin board ideas, and lesson plans to share with teachers. The packets focus on all of the heart disease risk factors—high blood pressure, high cholesterol intake, obesity, lack



As part of School Lunch Heart Week, public health nurses and doctors checked students' blood pressures.



Biology classes dissected a cow's heart, using diagrams lunch managers had received at the seminars.



of exercise, smoking, diabetes, and a family history of heart attack. Teachers interested in relating their particular subject areas to good heart health and good nutrition can gear the packet's general lesson plans specifically for their classes—from elementary to high school.

Activities at one school

DeKalb County's Walker High School was one of the Georgia schools taking part in the project last year. School food service manager Virginia Smith, who coordinated School Lunch Heart Week activities at Walker, says both teachers and students were extremely cooperative.

Biology classes studied human heart models and dissected a cow's heart, using diagrams on heart circulation and physiology from the packet. The students also typed their own blood in the biology lab.

A physical education teacher conducted a special program, "Lifestyles of the Heart," to demonstrate to her students the effects of varying amounts of exercise on the heart. She divided students into groups for activities ranging in exertion from reading to running. Each student took his or her own pulse before and after the exercise and then compared the results with the pulse rates for students in different groups.

Activities extended to the library, which the school turned into a temporary blood pressure screening clinic. Public health nurses and doctors checked the students' blood pressures and gave them printed information on heart disease to share with their families.

"Everyone really got excited about the project," said Ms. Smith, an innovative manager who often generates that spirit of cooperation and excitement. She was one of the first in DeKalb County to offer choice menus, and she can now boast that she serves 1,000 students each day. That's about 75 percent of Walker's enrollment, a high participation rate for a high school.

School Lunch Heart Day

Ms. Smith and her workers went all out to make School Lunch Heart Day special for the students at Walker. They decorated the cafeteria with heart posters and covered the tables with brightly-colored tablecloths and flower arrangements. And, like all schools participating in School Lunch Heart Day, they served a special meal to emphasize how easily they could prepare a low-fat, low-cholesterol meal. At Walker, for example, the menu included: oven-baked chicken with barbecue sauce, cole slaw or tossed salad, English peas or green beans, gelatin with nonfat whipped topping, whole-wheat rolls, and skim milk. The beans and peas were seasoned with bouillon and cooked without fat, and the rolls were made with corn oil.

As sponsors of School Lunch Heart Week stressed, diet is very important in avoiding heart disease. Modifying the fat and cholesterol in the diet can substantially affect the levels of serum cholesterol in the body. But diet is not the whole answer—it's important to be aware of all of the "risk factors."

Students highly motivated

Like other young Georgians, the students at Walker responded enthusiastically to Heart Week activities. Sandra Owens, school pro-

gram coordinator for the Georgia Heart Association, says even young children benefit from the program. They're learning early in life to avoid habits that may lead to heart disease in later years. "The motivation of students participating in the program is very high," she says. "They are at an age where they are very interested in their bodies. And, they commit themselves with great zeal to the things that will help them keep in good shape. Kids tend to make commitments for their own behavior when they are young—and usually, those commitments are life-long." □

Tennessee managers take their message to the public

In honor of the thirtieth anniversary of the National School Lunch Program last year, FNS and the American School Food Service Association brought together the "You Are What You Eat" animals from the previous years.

A group of East Tennessee school food service supervisors went a step further and brought the animals to life at their school food service carnival in Kingsport. High school students in animal and clown costumes roamed the Fort Henry Mall giving shoppers nutrition education information and materials.

The carnival was the idea of 13 school lunch supervisors who de-

cided the public needed to know more about nutrition in general—and school lunch in particular. “For some time, we had all been meeting together once a month to attack problems,” explained State school food service consultant Marilyn Haga. “But, we decided that we had talked among ourselves long enough. We know our problems; we know where we’re weak and where we’re strong, but nobody else does. Everybody just takes the program for granted.”

Need for nutrition education

The supervisors concluded that their greatest need is public demand for, and support of, nutrition education in the public schools. As

Ms. Haga said, “Without nutrition education, the real value and strength of applied nutrition in the lunchroom, both as a catalyst to learning and as a provider of good health, is difficult or impossible for us to obtain.”

So the group decided to take the nutrition education story directly to the public. And the carnival, one of the largest shows ever displayed in the area, was the result.

The carnival was sponsored jointly by the Tennessee Department of Education and the School Food Service Supervisors’ Association. One of the major objectives of the carnival was to provide an opportunity to explain to the press, legislators, parents, educators, students, and the general public various

aspects of school food service programs, with special emphasis on promoting a better understanding of Federal funding and requirements.

A theme for each day

Each of the carnival’s 4 days was designated as a salute to a special group. The first day, “Legislative, Press, and Youth Day,” included a reception for local government officials and the press, and a rock band for the youth.

Ms. Haga explained, “We were making an effort to point out not only to the public but also to our State legislators that we have problems—as we’ll be the first to admit—but a lot of them stem from the fact that children do not have nutrition education. We wanted the legislators to understand that you do not have to set aside money for nutrition education as such—it can be integrated into other subject matter.”

On “Senior Citizens’ Day,” there was a country and western show, and on “Parents’ and Teachers’ Day,” a talent show. The last day, “School Food Service Employee Day” featured a kitchen band contest where food service personnel displayed an unusual use for their cooking utensils.

A variety of exhibits

About 30 educational exhibits and activities representing various aspects of school food service presented timely nutrition information or displayed available equipment and food products. Booths on nutrition labeling, the metric system, weight control, and the school breakfast program lined the mall. Also on display were entries in three contests—schools had prepared nutrition posters, lunchroom counter



Winding through the mall was a child-sized train, the “Type A Special.”

decorations which corresponded with particular menus, and standardized quantity recipes developed from family-sized recipes for these competitions.

One of the carnival's big attractions was the Kingsport City School Food Service's bakery. Enticed by the aroma of school-baked rolls, shoppers gathered around the display to watch the workers use their giant dough hooks, convection ovens, and other institutional cooking equipment.

Educational games and shows

The carnival sponsors had designed a number of nutrition education carnival games especially for children. For correct answers to the nutrition questions, children won school lunch pencils. Bowling, fishing, and the bean bag toss were especially popular with the children. Even pre-schoolers were included: they could participate in the games by identifying foods as nutritious or as "junk." Also, two puppet shows—one on breakfast and one on healthful foods—ran several times daily. The shows, "The Snoopy Success Story" and "The Unhappy Alligator," were especially designed for younger children, and both featured the four major food groups.

"It's interesting, but sad, what we have discovered through these nutrition education games, said Ms. Haga. "Many children don't even recognize the names of foods, especially vegetables. They have no idea what these foods are; they've never been exposed to them. And people complain to us because their children don't eat? Well, children are children, and they are not going to eat something if they don't know what it is."

Winding through the mall was a child-sized circus train, the "Type A Special," obviously on the track to good nutrition. The train cars

represented the various parts of the Type A lunch—there was a vegetable car, a main dish car, a fruit

car, a bread car, and a milk caboose.

The train was a favorite of the children—one 4-year-old boy stood enthralled by the car full of cardboard monkeys. He giggled and pointed to the monkey holding a carrot until his mother walked over and read the sign: "We don't monkey around in school lunch. We eat our vegetables." □

By Anne Murray Sims



Minnesota's Food Stamp Center

When local Minnesota food stamp staffs think of problems, they think of one person—Wally Goettl. And Wally Goettl likes it that way.

Mr. Goettl is the head of Minnesota's food stamp policy center, begun 3 years ago by the State Department of Public Welfare. Its aim is to help local staffs make fast and accurate decisions in certifying and providing benefits to food stamp recipients.

The food stamp policy center is essentially a one-person operation. Working with the guidance of Food Stamp Program Supervisor Julie Morris, Wally Goettl does just about everything himself. He receives telephone inquiries from local staffs. He researches answers, using a special reference file the State has developed. And he makes sure local staffs get a written answer within 5 days. He serves more than 85 counties, handling some 250 to 275 policy questions each month.

Grew out of a similar center

Begun in 1975, the food stamp policy center is part of the State Department of Public Welfare's corrective action efforts. It grew out of a similar center started 3 years before to eliminate policy misinterpretations in the Aid for Dependent Children Program (AFDC).

"Before the center began operating, we handled food stamp policy questions through informal telephone conversations," explains Barbara Stromer, assistant director of the Income Maintenance Division, under which Minnesota's Food Stamp Program operates.

The staff realized they needed to make some changes if they were going to have consistent policy, based on decisions that could be easily traced and reviewed in case of appeal. Since the AFDC center had already demonstrated its effectiveness in this area, the food stamp staff decided to use the same

approach, and they set up shop in the same office as the AFDC center.

Although the two operations are separate, the staffs of both centers share office facilities and clerical help. There are many times when food stamp specialists need to check on cases involving AFDC, so the arrangement works out well.

Especially suited to Minnesota

Julie Morris takes pride in the fact that the center's idea originated in Minnesota and that it works well. She feels it's particularly effective in Minnesota, where, unlike more heavily populated States, there's a disproportionate number of rural county welfare departments that are one-person operations.

"If workers in our St. Paul or Minneapolis office are having difficulty solving a problem, quite often they'll consult co-workers. But in our less populated areas," she explains, "a worker can't do this and will often resort to shopping around for an answer.

"Unfortunately," says Ms. Morris, "this often produces conflicting interpretations about what should be done, and can be a serious problem when consistent policy isn't applied throughout the State.

"We feel, in the last analysis, the State should be held responsible and accountable for decisions on policy," she continues. "Obviously, accountability can be next to impossible when a number of people are involved. The center eliminates the need to shop around because workers can come directly to us."

Speeds service to counties

As the "corrective action specialist" who actually handles questions

from county workers, Wally Goettl is familiar with the way the center benefits local staffs.

"Before the center began operating," he says, "it was a lot harder getting off memos concerning policy questions within a reasonable period of time. The usual problems of having more pressing work, or being out of the office, led to policy problems being answered inaccurately or only after long delays.

"But now, because the center's only responsibility is handling policy problems, county workers no longer face unnecessary delays. The center is committed to responding to all policy questions in writing within 5 days." Mr. Goettl adds, "In terms of efficiency, that's very important, especially when a worker's facing a deadline for providing a decision to a client."

In addition to making services more efficient and effective, the center acts as a reinforcement for workers. Initially, some State people opposed the center because they were concerned that county workers might become overly dependent or in some cases, irresponsible about doing the work themselves.

"Fortunately, we've got very competent county welfare workers who won't use the center to solve something they already know," explains Ms. Morris. "But on debatable policy, or in cases where they're expecting an appeal, workers are using the center more frequently to make certain their decision agrees with State policy."

Ms. Morris says the center is received favorably by clients, too. "I believe clients accept decisions from the center more readily than from an individual person—regardless of whether or not decisions are in their favor—because they know the decisions were checked through the State."

How the center works

The diagram below outlines what happens to a policy problem from the time it's initially reviewed by the county worker.

1

Worker to client: "I'd better check this out with the State policy center for accuracy."

2

Worker to liaison with FSP center: "Would you call up the food stamp policy center and check this policy out for me? I'm pretty sure I know the correct solution, but I'd like to check it out for accuracy and any changes that have occurred."

3

Liaison to Wally Goettl at the FSP center: "Wally, this is Jane Doe of the Good County welfare department and we've got a policy problem we'd like to check out."

4

Wally to Julie Morris: I've gone through the food stamp policy manual and believe this answer to be the most appropriate response for the problem. Check it out for accuracy and make any modifications."

5

Julie to Wally: "I've made a few modifications but basically everything is correct. It's okay, so go ahead and get it typed in triplicate. In addition to sending one copy to the county, send one to Quality Control and keep a third for our files."

6

Worker to client: "We received a reply from the State today concerning your case, and this is State policy."

Some of the more frequently asked questions deal with how to properly figure out benefits for one- and two-family economic units, anticipated expenses, and income.

"If we looked at the files right now, probably the section dealing with income would be bulging," indicates Ms. Morris. "It's almost impossible to estimate without actually going through the files, but I bet we get anywhere from 5 to 20 calls a day concerning income."

Barbara Stromer adds, "Whenever we can't answer a question, we delay giving a recipient a decision until we can get an answer either from the FNS Midwest Regional Office or the FNS Washington staff. It's not something we do often, but sometimes it is both a necessary and efficient tactic."

All responses are filed

After the center answers a policy question, the response gets filed in the policy manual. Each response goes into the section used in answering the question, and periodically the food stamp staff examines the answers in each section to see if the manual needs revision.

"We've found that going to the file and comparing the questions we received against what's on the manual page is an effective way of making sure the manual spells out the correct policy for particular problems," explains Ms. Morris. "If there seems to be a question that continually occurs time and time again, it's a good indication a particular part of the manual needs revision or that we need to get

something on this question into the manual."

Computerization is unlikely

Ms. Morris says the center may expand to handle medical and general assistance and other policy programs their division is responsible for.

"We don't foresee any problems in handling a heavier caseload if we do expand," she says. "However, if the caseload becomes too much for Wally to handle, we'd probable hire another person. We can very easily justify a personnel expansion on just the commendations the center receives from the county workers."

She continues, "We've looked into the possibility of computerizing our program if the caseload becomes top-heavy. But, in our case, it would be almost impossible. Most of our policy problems are so case specific that it takes an expert to make correct policy evaluations and decisions. But in addition to that, the way we operate now makes our contact with the counties more personal, and as long as we can provide efficient personalized service, we'll probably stick with the center."

Ms. Stromer thinks the center has been instrumental in helping bring the State closer to the county workers and that this has a positive effect on the workers' attitudes. "Our experience has been that workers in places outside of St. Paul or Minneapolis look upon the State staff as that thing down in St. Paul doing whatever it can to make their job more difficult," she says.

"The center has reached its primary objective—of providing centralized policy disbursement—but has also humanized the State to the county workers because we're dealing with them directly all the time."



By Frank Johnson

Families Garden Cooperatively

It is early winter, and the soil around Saratoga and Mechanicville, New York, has already hardened.

Undistinguishable from the rest of this rural area, two small gardens that flourished during the summer have turned a dull brown. The bent and brittle stalks are a subtle reminder of the activity that engulfed these plots just a few months before.

What took place was an experiment in gardening, successful cooperative gardening by low-income families who used all the resources they could muster to make their project work.

Three years ago, the Saratoga County Economic Opportunity Council opened the two community gardens for low-income people who wanted to grow their own vegetables but lacked the necessary equipment and land to do it.

Sixty families participated

This year, more than 60 families benefited from the cooperative arrangement. About half the families were food stamp recipients who used their stamps to buy seeds and plants.

Food stamp program regulations allow participants to purchase seeds and plants to grow food for home consumption. Participants make their purchases at authorized stores, using the same procedures they use to purchase regular food items. For a relatively small outlay of food stamps, and a lot of hard work, a family can grow fresh vegetables to enjoy all summer. Many of the Saratoga and Mechanicville gardeners had enough produce to freeze or can for winter meals.

Land and tools are shared

During the growing season, co-op participants may work in the garden whenever they wish. There is no charge for using the land.

The council managed to get both garden sites at no cost, thanks to two area residents willing to let the group "borrow" their land. One was an acquaintance of a council member, a farmer who had a piece of vacant land outside of Saratoga Springs. The other was the owner of a small lot across from the public housing project.

Most of the tools, fertilizers and insecticides came from local merchants, who sold them to the council at cost. All equipment and supplies are stored in the council offices, and gardeners check out what they need when they come to work their plots. There's just about everything a serious gardener would want—shovels, hoes, spades, rakes, roto tillers, and insect sprays.

Families get individual plots

Each year, the gardens are divided into individual plots according to family size and, of course, ambition and willingness to work. No garden plot can be smaller than 15 by 20 feet or larger than 50 by 100 feet.

Last year, Harry Hall and his wife qualified for one of the largest plots because of their family size—they have four children. Mr. Hall admitted there was a lot of hard work involved.

"But well worth it when you realized that you were eating what you had grown," he added. "That is a nice feeling."

Teenager Ricky Garland would agree. An ambitious worker who has earned a few blisters for his labor, Ricky has worked his family's plot for the last two summers. This year he helped the family grow cabbage, cucumbers, beans, squash, peppers and eggplants.

Ricky's favorites, though, were tomatoes. "It was a real kick watching those little plants grow up into big tomatoes," he said.

Barbara Garland, Ricky's mother, bought all of the plants and seeds with food stamps. For \$20 in stamps, she and her family were able to grow a good portion of their summer vegetables. Their only extra purchases were lettuce, carrots, and celery. This year, like last, Ms. Garland preserved squash and beans.

Ms. Garland learned of the garden 2 years ago at a meeting of housing project residents. A guest speaker at that meeting was garden project coordinator Dianne Shippee, who explained how the co-op arrangement works and how food stamp recipients can buy seeds and plants. The coordinator later went into more detail on both points at the garden organization meetings held prior to the growing season.

Interest grows with work

According to Ms. Shippee, the meetings generated a great deal of interest, and the interest increased as people actually began working on their land.

"People were not afraid to ask questions or get their hands dirty," Ms. Shippee explained. "After a while they were all working like pros."

Equally enthusiastic was Chet Davis, the Saratoga Extension Service Horticultural Technician who has provided technical assistance and practice expertise whenever the gardeners have needed it. "I've

Solving Lunch Problems

been with the gardening project from the beginning," he said, "and I've been amazed and very impressed with our gardeners' enthusiasm for the task at hand.

"In a matter of months, they turned from green horns to ardent green thumbs," he laughed.

Results outweigh difficulties

One thing the gardeners learned was that farming has its problems as well as rewards.

"Our people had to haul water with a bucket from a creek several hundred yards away," Dianne Shippee explained, "and in the hot weather that's hard work."

There were also the usual problems of weather, insects and dis-

ease. But especially difficult was an incident involving vandalism.

"It was hard enough with the dry weather and everything else," said the project coordinator. "But when the vandals got in and stole the produce, that was heartbreaking."

Despite all the problems, the coordinator said, the harvest was a full one, and the families from both towns were pleased.

Will there be another garden next year?

"You bet," Ms. Shippee said. "And a lot more of our people will be using food stamps to buy plants and seeds. Those purchases keep putting food on their tables all year long."

By Herb Strum

More than 150 school systems took part in the Management and Technical Assistance Project sponsored by the Food and Nutrition Service.

Known as MTA, the project brought together Federal, State, and local child nutrition program administrators, who worked as teams to identify school food service problems and recommend solutions for them.

These two articles are about some spin-offs from MTA. The first tells how Arkansas is encouraging schools to use the teamwork approach in improving their school lunch and breakfast programs. The second tells how Boston public schools developed a solution to one of the problems they identified during an MTA review.

Workshops bring people together

Having workshops for school food service workers is not a new idea. National, State and local agencies often sponsor workshops that provide valuable training and opportunities to exchange ideas on shared problems.

But what about having workshops that involve not only school food service people, but teachers, students, and community members as well? That may be a new idea. And if it is, Arkansas can be proud to have come up with it.

This year, for the third year in a row, the Arkansas Department of Education is sponsoring a series of workshops to help schools and communities improve their school food service programs. Held at various schools throughout the State, the workshops focus on iden-



The garden's plentiful yield included these hearty cabbages.

tifying problems and recommending solutions for them.

Workshops in five regions

In organizing the series of workshops, the Department of Education divides the State into five work regions, with one consultant assigned to each region. Every fall, the consultants check participation records for their regions, looking for schools with lower than average participation. Each consultant selects one school district and extends an invitation to the school's superintendent or school food service director.

Participating schools make all the necessary arrangements—they schedule the conferences, they line up participants, they decide where the groups will meet. Prior to the workshops, many schools do preliminary research, often through questionnaires, to identify problem areas.

All five State consultants attend the workshops, which usually extend over a 3-day period and involve about 35 to 40 people. On the first day, the school superintendent opens the workshop, and the State school food service director addresses the group. Then the consultant who organized that particular region's workshop outlines the areas the workshop will examine.

After the introductions and the opening remarks, the group divides into committees of seven to eight people. Each committee includes a random selection of students, faculty members, parents, local business people, and food service personnel. And, each focuses on a particular area, such as: meal management, nutrition education, program management and administration, student involvement, or community involvement.

With the help of the local school

food service director, State consultants head the committees and act as panel moderators. Before closing, the committees make individual recommendations.

One workshop at work

The Mountain Home school district held the last workshop in the 1976-77 series. In opening the session, State school lunch coordinator James A. Niven explained the purpose of the workshop. "We are here to share our knowledge," he told participants. "You share with us, and we will share with you. We're here to help you take a look at your program. If there is any specific area that is not what you want it to be, maybe we can help."

In preparation for the workshop, Mountain Home had circulated a questionnaire, and the results pointed out an obvious problem area for the group to tackle first. Sixty-six percent of the students had gripes about the food. And, surprisingly, one of the least-liked foods turned out to be hamburgers, a daily offering on the choice line. Pizza, chili, and french fries led the list of favorites, but also in demand were salads, fresh fruits, and unmixed vegetables.

The questionnaire offered a partial solution to this problem, indicating students wanted to help plan their menus. School officials were delighted. "Student involvement in menu planning will be a big help to us," said Mountain Home high school principal Fred Dawson. "The students can give us some good ideas, and, at the same time, they can discover for themselves that menu planning is not quite as simple as it seems."

Nutrition education stressed

Committee members agreed on the merits of involving the students in menu planning. But, they said, there must also be efforts to provide

nutrition education so that students will make "nutritional" choices.

The committee working on nutrition education specifically recommended incorporating food and nutrition courses into the regular curriculum, perhaps as part of health courses. They also pointed out the necessity of making sure teachers have easy access to nutrition education courses, recommending that community colleges offer such courses.

The nutrition education committee also suggested serving only nutritious snacks in the classroom as a reinforcement for forming good eating habits. The meal management committee called for schools to be more concerned about the nutritional needs of students. They recommended eliminating candy and "pop" machines and adding more variety in the menu. For good meal management, they suggested using standardized quantity recipes to insure that nutritional requirements are met, and recommended having a choice line that really gives students some selection.

Other problems identified

To help get more parents involved, the community involvement committee suggested working more with the PTA, instituting an "open door" policy, and discussing food service operations in interviews on the local radio station.

The student involvement committee wanted to improve the cafeteria atmosphere by painting murals on the walls and providing music. The group also asked for a choice of lunches in the high school and a milkshake machine. Other suggestions included a salad plate, longer lunch periods, and a student taste panel.

In closing the workshop session, district superintendent Dr. James Willis pointed out that many suggestions could not be carried out by the school district during the next school year. At the same time, he said, a lot of the suggestions could and would be implemented as soon as possible.

"You have given a name and identity to a lot of problems," he said, "problems that perhaps we have been too close to the situation to see."

By Ronald J. Rhodes

New collection system saves time, avoids hassles

How can you protect against the overt identification of children receiving free or reduced-price meals and still avoid hassles at payment time? That was the problem for Boston schools until September 1976, when they introduced the cardex system.

The cardex is a 10- x 12-inch leatherette case capable of holding nearly 400 index cards. The case folds in the center and contains holders for 180 cards on each side.

The key to the system is that all children may choose to pay for lunch in advance—children paying full price as well as children paying reduced prices or receiving meals free. At most schools, special lunch attendants collect the advance payments; at others, teachers collect the payment. Students who do not wish to pay in advance pay the cashier directly.

Each month, or as necessary, the food service director updates the cards in the cardex to indicate the "status" of each child. A child's

status might change from "paying" to "free" or "reduced-price" at any time, due to job layoffs or other changes in family circumstances.

Other systems tried

Before instituting the cardex system, Boston schools had tried several systems of advance payment. One was a ticket system. The children bought books of tickets or received them free, depending on their status. The books were often lost, sometimes they became a gummy mess as they went through the washing machine. It took precious lunch hour minutes to make adjustments for lost and mutilated books. Teachers kept books for children likely to lose them, but



when teachers were absent, substitutes couldn't always find the books.

The schools also used a system of control cards. Teachers handed out cards to the children each day before lunch. The cards were collected in the cafeteria, counted and returned to the teacher at the end of the day. With cards in so many hands, some loss and confusion was inevitable.

New system more orderly

At the Washington Irving Middle School in the Roslindale section of Boston, school lunch director Dorothy Sheehan is enthusiastic about the cardex system.

"It is much more orderly because the students are regularly assigned to the same line," she says. The basis for assignment may be alphabetical, by room number, or by grade level. At Washington Irving, it is done by school cluster group.

Washington Irving has an average daily attendance of approximately 1,000 and serves almost 700 lunches. There are three cashiers and three 20-minute lunch periods. As students file through the line, they give their names to the cashier, who checks the names on the card in the file.

As the cashiers get to know the children assigned to their line, the line moves quickly. The same card is used for both breakfast and lunch in all Boston schools.

Ms. Sheehan is certain the cardex system saves money. "First, we don't have to buy all those books and ship them around," she says. "Also, it discourages program abuses such as trading tickets."

"It's better for the teachers too, because with the cardex they don't become involved in tickets," Ms. Sheehan adds. □

By Catherine Tim Jensen



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